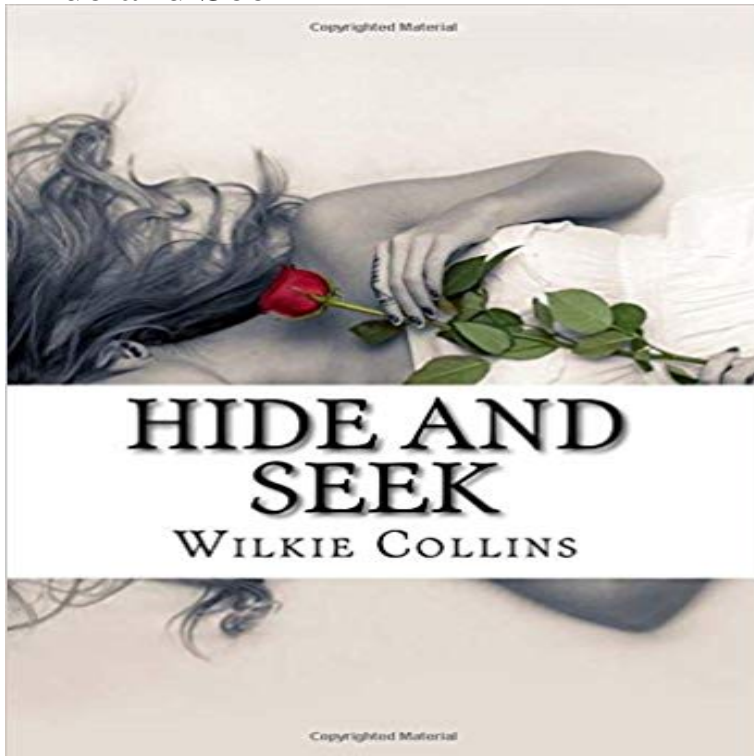


Hide and Seek



The novel has a convoluted plot, in common with many of Collins works. It falls into two parts: the history of Madonna Grice Matthew Grices discovery of her. Mary Grice is courted and seduced by a man calling himself Arthur Carr. Carr is called away on business, and his letters to Mary (presumably professing his honourable intentions toward her) are intercepted by Marys sister Joanna, who considers Carr to be socially inferior to the Grices. Joanna drives the pregnant, unmarried Mary from the family home. Mary gives birth to a daughter and dies miserably, attended only by performers from a travelling circus. Martha Peckover, wife of one of the clowns, adopts the baby (also Mary) and takes possession of her one heirloom, a bracelet made of Mary Sr.s & Carrs hair. Mary Jr. becomes a circus performer and is struck deaf and dumb after a riding accident, making her one of several of Collins characters with severe physical disabilities. She is exploited by the circus owner, and to rescue her Mrs Peckover takes her to the home of a minister, Dr Joyce. There Valentine Blyth, a painter, sees her and himself adopts her. Mary Jr. grows up beautiful and acquires the nickname Madonna for her resemblance to figures of the Virgin Mary in Italian Renaissance painting. She is admired by Valentines friend Zack Thorpe, a high-spirited but vacuous young man somewhat resembling Allan Armadale in the novel of that name. Zack leaves home after disagreements with his ultra-religious and disciplinarian father. In a brawl in a disreputable theatre, Zack defends a man who turns out to be Matthew (Mat) Grice, Mary Sr.s brother, and moves in with him. Mat has spent decades wandering the Americas, but returns home after making his fortune on the California goldfields. Mats next concern is to find out the fate of his family. He establishes from Joanna that Mary Sr. is dead but her child was born

alive. Mat decides to trace the child. Zack introduces Mat to Valentine, who invites Mat to sit for him as a model. In Valentines house, Mat meets Madonna and also catches sight of a hair bracelet, which he suspects is originally Marys. He secretly obtains a key to Valentines bureau and on a visit to the house opens the bureau, identifies the bracelet and satisfies himself that Madonna is Marys child. He is surprised in the act by Madonna but escapes by blowing out her candle, after which she can neither see nor hear him. Mat then sets about finding Arthur Carr. His efforts are hindered by Joannas death and Mrs Peckovers disclosure that neither she nor Valentine know who he was. However Mat is struck by the resemblance between Carrs hair (of which he has obtained the part unused in the bracelet) and Zacks. He surmises that Carr is Zacks straitlaced father, confronts him and obtains his confession. Madonna is thus revealed as Zacks half-sister, and he can no longer court her. He accompanies Mat to the New World, but eventually persuades him to return home to his adoptive family of the Blyths (with whom Madonna remains) and Zack.

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